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Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
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Item 3
Indigenous women

Draft recommendations

1. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues recognizes the unique contributions made by indigenous women within their families, communities and nations and at the international level. At the same time, the Forum expresses concern about the multiple forms of discrimination experienced by indigenous women, based on gender and race/ethnicity, and the complex problems stemming from this discrimination. In addition, globalization presents new challenges and problems for indigenous women in many parts of the world. Indigenous women's roles have eroded due to the compounding factors of loss of natural resources and depletion of the ecosystems, their transformation into cash economies, changes in local, social and decision-making structures, and their lack of political status within States. Indigenous women, while sharing many of the concerns in the areas of poverty, human rights, and economic and social development with other women throughout the world, also offer a distinct and important perspective on these issues. The fact that "indigenous women" are not a homogeneous category but represent a wide variety of cultures with different needs and concerns, should be a central premise for the design of policies and programmes.

2. The Forum reconfirms its commitment to working tirelessly within its mandated areas and to promoting and protecting the human rights of indigenous women. In so doing, the Forum recognizes the crucial role that indigenous men and boys play in traditional societies in achieving gender equality and that that natural gender balance must be reinstated in culturally appropriate ways, within indigenous societies and beyond, and encourages all stakeholders to enlist their support. Recognizing the progress made by organizations representing indigenous peoples, United Nations agencies and Governments, and building upon the recommendations made in its reports on the first and second sessions, the Forum provides the advice and recommendations set out below (further draft recommendations are issued under item 4).

3. The Forum encourages United Nations bodies whose activities have an impact on indigenous women (including, but not limited to, the United Nations High

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Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), the regional commissions, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, especially the Division for the Advancement of Women, and the Department of Information of the United Nations Secretariat), to integrate the human rights, including the reproductive health rights, and special concerns and needs of indigenous women into their programmes and policies, and to report regularly to the Forum. The reports should contain detailed information on the strategies and policy assessments at the regional and national levels and on the progress made within existing programmes directed at and relating to indigenous women, as well as policy assessments and recommendations concerning the issue of indigenous women.

4. Noting that the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women makes no reference to indigenous women and that it does not take into account the specific nature of the gender dimension of racial discrimination, the Forum recommends that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women:

(a) Pay special attention to the issues related to maintaining the integrity of indigenous women and the gender dimension of racial discrimination against indigenous peoples;

(b) Organize a meeting, in collaboration with indigenous women, UNIFEM, UNESCO and UNDP, with the objective of beginning a process to develop and adopt a general recommendation on indigenous women, including women living under colonization.

5. The Forum recommends that the Commission on Human Rights appoint or designate a rapporteur to undertake a study on genocidal and ethnocidal practices perpetuated on indigenous peoples, including programmes for the sterilization of indigenous women and girls, the use of indigenous communities as subjects of nuclear testing or for the storage of nuclear waste and as subjects of the testing of unapproved drugs on indigenous women, children and peoples.

6. The Forum encourages all United Nations entities to mainstream indigenous gender issues and to integrate the special needs and concerns of indigenous women into their programmes and policies by taking the following steps:

(a) Compiling and integrating disaggregated data (both qualitative and quantitative nature and taking into account local and regional cultural/social/economic differences) on indigenous women's issues in their own annual reports. The Forum commends those who have already begun to address this issue of lack of relevant data;

(b) Integrating indigenous experts on indigenous women's issues in their programming staff;

(c) Appointing indigenous focal points on indigenous women's issues within wider gender portfolios;

(d) Planning special events centred on the theme "Indigenous women" and integrating that theme in their documentation and outreach activities (web site, reports etc.);

(e) Increasing outreach to indigenous women's organizations worldwide;

(f) Increasing the outreach and information flow to and from the academic community, including indigenous educational institutions, on indigenous women's issues.

7. The Forum underlines the importance of technical cooperation and capacity-building programmes regarding and involving indigenous women, and in that respect recommends that such programmes conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, ILO, UNDP, among others, include projects regarding and involving indigenous women.

8. The Forum recognizes the instrumental role of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) and welcomes the identification of "indigenous women" as an emerging key issue, the creation of a task force on indigenous women and the inclusion of an item on indigenous women in its 2005 agenda. The Forum requests its secretariat to transmit to it the results of the 2005 session of IANWGE on indigenous women.

9. The Forum urges the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, in conjunction with other relevant United Nations entities, to convene a workshop on the theme "Indigenous women, traditional knowledge and the Convention on Biological Diversity" in collaboration with the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network and the Commission of Intellectual Property and Commercialization of the Intercontinental Network of Indigenous Women of the Americas.

10. Given the large number of indigenous migrants within and beyond national borders and the particular vulnerability of indigenous women migrants, as well as the lack of adequate data and attention to their problems, the Forum recommends launching a new initiative involving various stakeholders, including the Inter-Agency Support Group, the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in order to face this urgency. The Forum recommends, as a first step, the convening of a workshop on the theme "Migration of indigenous women" in order to highlight the urgency and scale of the issue, including the alarming trend of trafficking indigenous women within and across national borders, and the development of recommendations and guidelines for addressing the problems faced by indigenous migrant women. Participants to the workshop should be a selected number of members of the Forum, relevant United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes, and experts from indigenous organizations, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, Governments and academia. The objectives of the workshop should be:

(a) To underscore the urgency and scale of the issue;

(b) To highlight and address the lack of reliable data on the issue and to promote the systematic collection of data (of both quantitative and qualitative

nature) by relevant United Nations and other intergovernmental entities, Governments, NGOs, indigenous organizations, and academia;

(c) To review and analyse existing data;

(d) To provide a report, including recommendations, to the Forum.

11. Violent conflicts and militarization fundamentally affect the lives of indigenous women and their families and communities, causing violations of their human rights and displacement from their ancestral lands. Yet indigenous women do not see themselves as passive victims but have taken up the roles of mediators and peace builders. Recognizing the profound concerns of the impact of conflict situations on indigenous women, the Forum recommends:

(a) That IOM and other relevant United Nations entities incorporate the needs and priorities of women and girls as ex-combatants in the design and implementation of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and ensure their full access to all resources and benefits provided in reintegration programmes, including income-generation and skill-development programmes;

(b) That UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme, and other field-based agencies collect data on the situation of indigenous women living in conflict areas. Such data would be valuable for analysis and programme development;

(c) That IANWGE integrate indigenous women issues into its strategies on women, conflict, peace and security;

(d) That the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other United Nations human rights bodies ensure that statutory provisions prohibiting war crimes and crimes against humanity cover criminal acts perpetrated on a gender basis since their occurrence remains particularly acute, especially the high incidence of mass rape and mutilation during armed conflict;

(e) That UNHCR give priority to indigenous women and their families who are displaced internally and externally by force due to armed conflict in their territories.

12. To ensure that the concerns and priorities of indigenous women are properly taken into account, the Forum urges States:

(a) To take concrete steps to increase the participation of indigenous women in governance and decision-making structures at all levels;

(b) To clearly identify and define the issues and needs of indigenous women, taking into account regional and local cultural differences;

(c) To develop and strengthen structures and mechanisms for the advancement of indigenous women within the wider agenda for the advancement of women; to clearly define their mandate by taking into account the holistic and cross-cutting nature of indigenous women's issues; to allocate appropriate resources to those institutions; and to provide support from the national political leadership to those structures;

(d) To ensure the implementation of international human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against

Women, regarding indigenous women, and to integrate those instruments into the formulation of a coherent national public policy for indigenous women (including legal frameworks, budget allocations and specific programmes and projects addressing indigenous women's issues);

(e) To ensure equal access of indigenous women to decision-making and governmental bodies, political parties, judiciary, trade unions etc.;

(f) To lend support to NGOs (both international and national) dealing with issues involving indigenous women;

(g) To increase indigenous women's capacity for decision-making and political participation, and to ensure that adequate numbers of indigenous women are placed in positions of political leadership as well as in governance and public administration.

13. The Forum, to underscore its long-term commitment to the issue of "indigenous women", recommends that its secretariat:

(a) Assist IANWGE in its efforts to mainstream indigenous women's issues throughout the United Nations system;

(b) Strengthen liaison with the Forum's portfolio holders in order to provide feedback on indigenous women's issues in each of the mandated areas to the Forum;

(c) Promote the monitoring and reporting on the implementation process of programmes within the United Nations system designed to address indigenous women's issues and the assessment of their impact;

(d) Increase outreach to indigenous women's groups and assist them in networking and information-sharing;

(e) Create strong liaison relationship with universities and other institutions of learning and research with the aim of mainstreaming indigenous women's issues in academic curricula, assist indigenous women's organizations in identifying and effectively utilizing available education resources and programmes, and promote capacity-building through fellowships, grants etc.;

(f) Build broad-based awareness of indigenous women's issues by increasing the Forum's media outreach (e.g., through newsletters, radio, web site, publications in journals on indigenous issues).